

# Newsletter for Birdwatchers

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VOL. XXV NO. 5 & 6 MAY - JUNE 1985



# **PACHMARHI**

## **THE HILL RESORT OF FLOWERS AND FALLS**

Far from the madding crowd — to peace and serenity.

Where nature is still nature—Pure, unspoiled.

Out of this world. The crisp sunshine and the air spiked with the scent of wild flowers.

In the heart of the hills are cascades with magical names —Bee Fall, Duchess fall, Little fall.

Visit Pachmarhi's sixty - four sites, view - points, caves, temples, hill - tops, water falls, swimming pools and cool retiring brooks or simply walk through dappled meadow and glen to Doctor's Delight or do nothing at all and do it beautifully on the undiscovered hills of Pachmarhi.

D. I. P.

DIRECTORATE OF INFORMATION & PUBLICITY  
GOVERNMENT OF MADHYA PRADESH

NEWSLETTER

FOR BIRDWATCHERS

Vol. XXV No.5 and 6

May-June 1985

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## Editorial:

Progress on the Questionnaire for Birdwatchers: Kumar Ghorpade says - At the time of writing (May 21,) I have received over 40 replies, which is very encouraging and satisfying! Mr Zafar Futehally has passed on those questionnaires that were addressed to him and is also pleased at your response.

I have responded to a few initial answers from colleagues and would like to assure all of you that I am thrilled at your enthusiasm and would like to maintain a personal contact with each of you (albeit through correspondence, until we meet) in future. Those who have sent in questionnaires but not heard from me, please await my response a while. Those who are yet thinking about responding, stop thinking--get your pen to work on the simple questionnaire and mail it to me pronto! Its time we got all the coaches (passenger cars) of our 'Indian Birdwatchers Train' locked together and on the rails speeding away at our ultimate destination! Do write and join the gang. My thanks to those of you who have sent in the questionnaire, and my plea to those who have not, to send it as soon as possible.

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The Sahyadri Birds: Readers will enjoy the splendid article by Ranjit Daniels on Sahyadri Birds. It is curious that the two subspecies of the Black-headed babbler are found on either side of the Palghat Gap. One would have thought that with the easy accessibility provided by the Gap, the two subspecies would meet and inter breed in course of time. Obviously, the ecological conditions are so different on two sides of the Gap, that this has not happened. The same situation seems to apply to the White-breasted laughing thrush and its two subspecies.

Incidentally, I wish Ornithologists would not keep changing names of birds. In the case of the subspecies of the black-headed babbler, *bourdilloni* in Kerala, and *siccata* in Ceylon, G.M.Henry refers to *siccata* as *Nigrifrons*. What ever the name, the black-headed babbler is a fascinating species, as will be seen from its description, No.1224, in the Handbook. It is a denizen of ever green biotope and seldom ascends a meter or two above the ground. But when it does, it appears to feel uncomfortable, and drops perpendicularly to the ground at the slightest alarm.

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Bird Watcher's Digest: As our readers have been informed earlier, there is an exchange arrangement between our Newsletter and the Bird Watcher's Digest. This is a splendid bimonthly publication and those who wish to subscribe may write to:

Bird Watcher's Digest  
P.O. Box 110  
Marietta  
OHIO 45750  
U.S.A.

In the January-February issue, there is an account of the hazards involved in viewing the nest of the philippine eagle. This is the monkey-eating eagle of Mindanao and is one of our most endangered birds. I quote two paragraphs from the article, to give you a flavour of the writing and the occasion. 'So, one day after we had left the captive breeding station, we had reached our destination - a single tree! We were already a little tired when we reached the base of that tree at 6.00 am. Well, it wasn't just any old tree! For starters, it was perhaps 15 feet across at the base and disappeared 150 feet up in the forest canopy. The tree was hollow inside because it is a strangler fig tree, a parasitic vine that starts growing on another tree. Twining around and around the host tree, it eventually kills the host, leaving the vine as an independent and self-supporting tree. When the host eventually rots away, the remaining vine-tree is hollow.

At 6.00 am I squeezed my way into the hollow 'trunk' at the base of the tree and looked up. It was a unique feeling. I had never before stood inside a hollow tree looking straight up 100 feet. Now had I ever climbed up a tree inside it! The intertwining and fused vines created a lattice-work effect, so that light penetrated the trunk in many places, producing a natural filigree. These openings provided the steps and hand-holds for the climb.

When I crawled out on the platform at 100 feet, Lucia had already been there for some time! She was flushed with a sense of accomplishment and excitement. And well she should have been! Climbing that tree was nothing less than heroic. And besides, she had already been observing the 16-week-old eaglet through a 20-power scope. A Philippine eagle at this age seems already about the size of our bald eagle, even though it cannot yet fly'.

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New Guinea Bird Society: We also have an exchange programme with the New Guinea Bird Society. Their Newsletter has been in trouble for sometime, because of shortage of funds, but they seem to be getting over-it. There are a number of birds common to Papua New Guinea and India, and if you wish to get the Newsletter, write to:

The Secretary,  
New Guinea Bird Society  
P.O. Box 1598  
Boroko  
PAPUA NEW GUINIA.

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Mark Twain and the Indian Crow: Peter Jackson has sent me this piece on the Indian crow written by Mark Twain. This is taken from his book 'Following the Equator'. I came to know the Bird of Birds - the Indian crow-well, by and by, and be infatuated with him. I suppose he is the hardest lot that wears feathers. Yes, and the cheerfulest, and the best satisfied with himself. He never arrived at what he is by any 'careless process, or any sudden one; he is a work of art, and 'art is long'; he is the product of immemorial ages, and of deep calculation; one can't make a bird like that in a day. He has been re-incarnated more times than Siva; and he has kept a sample of each incarnation, and fused it into his constitution. In the course of his evolutionary promotions, his sublime march towards ultimate perfection, he has been a gambler, a low comedian, a dissolute priest, a fussy women, a blackguard, a scoffer, a liar, a thief, a spy, an informer, a trading politician, a swindler, a professional hypocrite, a patriot for cash, a reformer, a lecturer, a lawyer, a conspirator, a rebel, a royalist, a democrat, a practitioner and propagator of irreverence, a meddler, an intruder, a busybody, an infidel, and a wallower in sin for the mere love of it. The strange result, the incredible result, of this patient accumulation of all damnable traits is that he does not know what care is, he does not know what sorrow is, he does not know what remorse is, his life is one long thundering ecstasy of happiness, and he will go to his death untroubled, knowing that he will soon turn up again as an author or something, and be even more intolerably capable and comfortable than ever he was before.

In his straddling wide forward step, and his springy sidewise series of hops, and his impudent air, and his cunning way of canting his head to one side upon occasion, he reminds one of the American blackbird. But the sharp resemblances stop there. He is much bigger than the

blackbird; and he lacks the blackbird's trim and slender and beautiful build and shapely beak; and of course his sober garb of gray and rusty black is a poor and humble thing compared with the splendid lustre of the blackbird's metallic sables and shifting bronze glories. The blackbird is a perfect gentleman, in deportment and attire, and is not noisy, I believe, except when holding religious services and political conventions in a tree; but this Indian Sham quaker is just a rowdy, and is always noisy when awake - always chaffing, scolding, scoffing, laughing, ripping, and cursing, and carrying on about something or other. I never saw such a bird for delivering opinions. Nothing escapes him; he notices everything that happens, and brings out his opinion about it, particularly if it is a matter that is none of his business. And it is never a mild opinion, but always violent and profane - the presence of ladies does not affect him. His opinions are not the outcome of reflection, for he never thinks about anything, but heaves out the opinion that is on top of his mind, and which is often an opinion about some quite different thing and does not fit the case. But that is his way; his main idea is to get out an opinion, and if he stopped to think he would lose chances.....'

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The Sahyadri Birds by Ranjit R.J. Daniels, Centre for Ecological Sciences, Sirsi, H. Kanera - 581 402: The Sahyadri ridge, better known as the Western Ghats is Geographically unique. Cut off from the more contiguous Indo-Malayan sub-region, it is now a terrestrial island, supporting a very diverse biome. Many of the existing life forms are endemic to it. Unfortunately, some of these are already on the verge of extinction. Perhaps this is due to ignorance. Many may still not know about the variety of plants and animals that are found on the Sahyadris. Many do not realise the role each of these organisms has to play in its habitat. To those who are not familiar with the humid evergreen forests of the Sahyadris and the diversity of life forms they support, this brief account on birds should be appealing.

The Sahyadri ridge stretches between river Tapti and Kanyakumari, the southern extreme of the Peninsula. There is considerable variation in the type of vegetation from North to South. Climax Tropical Evergreen type of forests are well represented in parts of Tamilnadu and Kerala. This is probably due to the fact that the rainfall in the south is more uniformly distributed through the year. These forests are replaced by semi-evergreen vegetation towards the north and moist deciduous in the east.

Most birds of the Sahyadris are believed to be Indo-Chinese in origin. Their nearest relatives are seen in the North-eastern limits of our country. Excluding the waders and the marsh birds there may be about 400 forms of birds on this hilly strip. Some are strictly forest dwellers whereas most have adapted themselves to freely use disturbed and man-made habitats. Majority of the birds spread over the entire ridge while a certain number of species have a very restricted distribution. They are either patchy or local. A few passerines wintering on the ghats breed in the Himalayas only. Also we have a handful of birds endemic and confined to the Sahyadris.

The patterns of distribution in some of these birds are very interesting. The Sahyadri ridge is broken at a few places. The Palghat Gap in Kerala is very important ornithologically. The two subspecies of the blackheaded babbler (Rhopocichla atriceps) within our limits are separated from each other at this point. A similar example can be quoted of the white-breasted laughing thrush (Garrulax jerdoni) in which the subspecies fairbanki and meridionale are separated at the Achankevil gap in the south.

The Ceylon frogmouth (Batrachostomus moniliger) is a curious looking bird with a very patchy distribution on this humid forest tract. Hitherto it has been reported only from North Kanara district and Kerala. Its cousin the Hodgson's frogmouth (B. hodgsoni) is found in the Himalayan region. Quite related to the frogmouths are the nightjars. The great eared nightjar (Eurostopodus macrotis bourdilloni) is again a patchily distributed bird. It has been reported from parts of Kerala and recently from Goa too. Another form of this bird occurs in the Burmese sub-region. The broad billed roller (Larystomus orientalis) is a bird of the southern Sahyadris with its nearest relative in the Himalayas. The Nilgiri house swallow (Hirundo tahitica dominicola) is a bird peculiar to the Nilgiris and Kerala. Other forms of this species are found in some of the Islands off our Peninsula. While the greyheaded myna (Sturnus malabaricus) is widely distributed through out our country, the white headed subspecies blythii, is restricted to the Sahyadris.

Special attention must be paid to the endemic species of this hilly ridge. There are at least 13 species of birds endemic to this ridge and are found nowhere else in this world. No sub-specific form has been recorded so far in most of these. The black and orange flycatcher (Muscicapa nigrorufa) and the Nilgiri verditer flycatcher (M. albicaudata) are local birds in the southern Sahyadris. The white bellied blue flycatcher (M. pallipes) on the other hand is



spread more or less over the entire ridge. These birds prefer the dense humid forests. The Nilgiri laughing Thrush (Garrulax cachinnans) and the whitebreasted laughing thrush (G. jerdoni) prefer the higher altitudes. The former is restricted to the Nilgiris alone for no obvious reason. The latter exists as 3 subspecies all occurring on the southern half of the ridge. The blue-winged parakeet (Psittacula columboides) and the Nilgiri wood pigeon (Columba elphinstoni) are endemic species too. In spite of its reported occurrence in the western Orissa, I would prefer to call the malabar whistling thrush (Myiophonus horstfieldi) and endemic Western Ghats species. In North Kanara district, I have never come across this bird outside the humid evergreen or semi-evergreen forests. The moist deciduous forests on the plateau, east of the ghats, appear to be unsuitable for the thrush.

White-bellied tree pie (Dendrocitta leucogastra) is probably rare in the northern half of the ghats. In North Kanara district I never came across one. This elegant Indian bird is only seen in the rainforests on this strip. A few others worth mentioning are the grey headed bulbul (Pycnonotus priocephalus) the Nilgiri Pipit (Anthus nilgheriensis), the small sunbird (Nectarinia minima) and the rufous babbler (Turdoides subrufus). The babbler exists as two subspecies which are separated at the Palghat Gap.

It is necessary to emphasize once more that the birds listed above are endemic Sahyadri species. Losing one of these means the loss of a kind from the face of our earth!

Of the birds that winter in the Sahyadri forests, the Indian bluechat (Erithacus brunneus), the brown breasted flycatcher (Muscicapa nuttallii) and the rufous tailed flycatcher (M. ruficauda) are examples. These three breed in the Himalayas.

Generally very little is known about all these humid forest birds in our country. How often does one come across the Nilgiri thrush (Zoothera dauma nilgheriensis) on the Western Ghats? Or how much information is there on the 2 forms of the shrewwing (Brachypteryx major)? The latter occur from southern Karnataka down through Kerala. The thrush a subspecies of the White's thrush is a rare resident bird of our humid forests. It also occurs in Sri Lanka and the Himalayas as different subspecies. Thirteen other forms of this bird have been reported from Thailand, Japan, New Guinea and Australia. The broadtailed grass warbler (Schoenicola platyura) is the only described species under

the genus. It has been authentically reported only from the grassy slopes of the Sahyadris and nowhere else within the Indian limits. The two other subspecific forms described till today are from parts of Africa.

Consider the hornbills. The Malabar grey hornbill (Tockus grisaeus) is a species restricted to the humid forests of the Sahyadris. The great pied hornbill (Buceros bicornis) has a scattered population along the ridge totally cut off from the Northeastern stock. Hornbills are declining in number. The great pied hornbill is known to nest on giant trees such as the Poon tree (Calophyllum tomentosum) up the ghats. In North Kanara, this species is one of the most exploited of trees. It is a hardwood tree used as ship masts. In many areas within the district, surveys have shown that the tree is extinct or nearly so. Has it affected the hornbill population here?

Tropical American scientists have reported plants and birds which are interdependent. These they call the 'keystone mutualists'. One cannot exist without the other! In our country we do not know for sure if there are such mutualists. Yet I do not think it wrong to believe that there are.

Someone points out the structural similarity between unrelated birds living in the forests of the Neotropics and those in the Old World Tropics. He calls our attention to the smallest humming birds and the large toucans in South American rainforests. In the Old World (that includes India) they are replaced by sunbirds and the magnificent hornbills.

Though unrelated, these birds have been designed to perform very similar functions in their own habitats. It is indeed something very interesting to think about. Examples have been quoted of some humming birds and Tropical American trees. We do know something about the flowerpeckers (Dicaeidae) and the Loranthus symbiosis. There can be some sort of mutualism in some of our trees and sunbirds too.

Vanishing habitats, the humid Sahyadri forests, may affect these birds irreversibly. Many Indian species of birds will go extinct from the face of this earth if we do not spare the Sahyadris. Lack of space forced me to abruptly wind up. There is a lot more that I can say on these splendid birds. Several other examples can be quoted too. However, I have limited the whole writing to just highlight a few very special features of these forest birds. I guess this helps you to think further and strive to save the Sahyadri birds.

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New Records - Ashy Minivet and Eyebrowed Thrush in Madras  
by V. Santharam, 68, Santhome High Road, Madras-600028:  
Recently we had the good fortune of adding two new species  
to the Birds of Madras - the Ashy Minivet (*Pericrocotus divari-*  
*catus*) and the Dark or Eyebrowed Thrush (*Turdus obscurus*).

The Ashy Minivet was observed by us on three occasions  
at the Guindy National Park. The dates of observation were  
9th and 16th December 1984 and 26th January 1985. Two birds  
were noticed on the first two occasions and about seven on  
the last.

The birds were about the size of bulbul but slimmer with  
proportionately longer tail. They were definitely larger  
than the small Minivet which is a common bird at Guindy. None  
of the birds had any bright colours that are usually associated  
with Minivets and instead wore a drab grey and white plumage.  
The upper parts were uniform brownish grey with a darker tail  
with white outer tail rectrices. The male was told apart by  
its darker (blackish) head and nape. A pale patch was also  
noticed on the forehead of the male. The female also had the  
patch but it appeared less conspicuous. The underparts  
were uniformly off-white. In flight, a white wingbar was  
noticeable.

These birds were seen in pairs excepting the last occasion  
on which a small flock of five birds (mostly female) were  
seen. They kept to trees, at an height varying from 20 to  
40 feet from the ground. Their calls, distinct and unmistak-  
able were pleasant, musical tinkling notes. The birds were  
heard on all the days both at perch and in flight. Their  
stance and behaviour was similar to those of other minivets.  
Once an Ashy Minivet was seen hovering briefly in an attempt  
to catch a caterpillar, suspended momentarily in air. On  
capturing the insect, it returned to its perch and battered  
the prey in a manner typical of the Campephagidae family.  
These birds did not appear to associate with other species.  
On the instance, a grey Drongo was noticed attacking a  
Minivet, perched on a tree, which took wing and returned to  
the same perch after circling about.

The Eyebrowed or dark thrush was also seen at the  
Guindy Park on 13th January, 1985. The flock, consisting  
of about six birds, was first seen on the branches of Acacia  
trees, preening themselves. Later they descended to the  
ground to forage in the thick undergrowth, hopping about in  
a typical thrush-like manner. The birds were observed for  
nearly an hour in excellent light and from a close distance  
of about 30 feet with the aid of good field glasses. The  
question of a mistaken identity does not arise since the  
bird cannot be confused with any other species.

These mynah-sized birds had olive brown back and wings. The male had grey head and upper breast and the female differed in having brownish head and white throat and upper breast. Two dark streaks one on each side of the throat was more conspicuous in the female. The lower breast and flanks were rufous brown, contrasting with white belly. But the most striking features of this species was the facial pattern. We noticed a distinct white eyebrow and another white line from the base of the beak to below the eye. The chin was also white. The legs were yellowish and the beak had a yellow patch at the base. We were also able to hear distinctly, the calls, described in the field guides as a thin pipit-like 'Zip-Zip' or 'tliip-tilp', especially in flight.

In the absence of any concrete evidence, the sight records of these two new species in Madras, far from its known distribution may not be accepted by senior ornithologists, although I have managed to get two record photographs of the Ashy Minivet in colour. The Ashy Minivet is an accidental vagrant in India with just two previous records - one from Port Blair on 19 November 1897 and the other from Kannala, near Bombay on 31 January, 1965 (Ali and Ripley, 1983). The normal range of this species is NE Asia, Japan, E. China, S.E. Asia and Philippine Island (Howard and Moore, 1984). The Eyebrowed Thrush is a common winter visitor to Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram. It has also been recorded from Bangladesh, Arunachal foothills, Sikkim and has straggled to Belgaum, Nepal and South Andaman Islands. It appears that this thrush is a good wanderer, having been recorded even in Britain as many as four times (Ferguson - Lees et al, 1983) and so its occurrence in Madras may not be totally surprising. The severe winter, this year, may be one of the probable reasons for the dispersal of these two species, from their usual winter quarters. It would be interesting to know from other birdwatchers if there has been any record of these or any such rear birds in their areas.

Observers: V. Santharam, R. Govind Kumar, M. Raghuraman and K.V. Sudhakar

Books consulted:

Ali, Salim and Ripley, Dillon S - Handbook of Birds of India and Pakistan, 1983 (Compact Edn)

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A Pictorial Guide to Birds of Indian Sub Continent, 1983.

- Ferguson-Lees, James et al - Shell Guide to Birds of Britain and Ireland, 1983
- Howard, Richard and Moore, Alick - A complete checklist of the Birds of the World, 1984.
- King, B.F. et al. - Field Guide to the Birds of South East Asia, 1975.
- Smythies, B.E. - Birds of Burma, 1984(Reprint)

Indian Bustards by Asad Rafi Rahmani: The twenty-two species of bustards belong to an ancient avian family Otididae. Their nearest relatives are cranes and rails. The bustard family is widely distributed in Africa, Europe and Asia. Only one species is found in Australia. Four species occur within our limits: the Great Indian Bustard, Ardeotis nigriceps; the lesser florican, Sypheotides indica; The Bengal Florican, Houbaropsis bengalensis and the Houbara Chlamydotis undulata. Only the Houbara is winter migrant to Gujarat and Western Rajasthan. The other three species are more or less endemic.

The Great Indian bustard is perhaps the most famous endangered bird of our country. Formerly it was widely distributed in almost all the dry grasslands of the country from U.P. to Tamil Nadu, Gujarat to Orissa, but now it is present in relict populations in Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka. For the last four years, the Bombay Natural History Society is doing intensive studies on this bird and we have found many interesting details. Though we have done extensive surveys and have seen them in many isolated areas, we think they survive in many more areas than we know at present.

For example, in March 1985, we found a small population of about ten birds near nellibanda village in Kurnool district (A.P.). Earlier we had seen bustards in two more areas in this district. If the birds are seen in three pockets, then why should they be absent in the intervening areas where the habitat is similar and the biotic and abiotic pressures almost same? Within a year our team found more than sixty bustards in Kurnool district itself. It is very unlikely that we have located all the bustards surviving in Andhra Pradesh. I think, in the Deccan region comprising Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, there must be many unknown populations of bustards which need to be discovered.

The lesser florican is a small enigmatic bird which is seen in the monsoon in Gujarat, eastern Rajasthan and certain parts of M.P. where it breeds. When the breeding season is over in September/October, the bird disappears and we do not know where it goes. Most of the winter records gathered by old references are from South India so perhaps it winters there but very few of them were sighted in recent years. Similarly, the Bengal florican is another mysterious bird which has sadly disappeared from most of its former haunts in the terai regions of U.P., Nepal, Bihar, Bengal and Assam. There is not even a good photograph of this bird in the wild!

The BNHS has also started a five years' project on the floricans to study these rare birds and to devise management plans for their conservation. We are collecting all the recent and old sighting records of the bustards and the floricans. The BNHS has printed 5000 posters of bustards, 4000 about floricans and 4000 pamphlets in ten languages for wide distribution and publicity. Readers are requested to send any information (even anecdotal) about these birds to the Society. We can send the relevant posters if the readers can help us in publicising the plight of the Indian bustards. For further information, please write to Asad R. Rahmani, Bombay Natural History Society, Hornbill House, Shahid Bhagat Singh Road, Bombay 400 023.

#### LOCAL NAMES

Language/Region	Great Indian Bustard	Lesser Florican	Bengal Florican
Hindi	Hakma, Sohan	Leekhi, Chhota Charat, Barsati, Aila Charaz, Khar mur-grass peacock	Charas, Charg, Charat
Rajasthan	Godawan		
Gujarati	Ghorar	Khar mor	-
Kutch	Gudad	Tiloor	-
Marathi	Maldhok, Khardhok	-	-
Kannada	Yereladdu, Heri Hakki, Arlukujina hakki	Kannoul	-

Language/Region	Great Indian Bustard	Lesser Florican	Bengal Florican
Telugu	Beta meka Bat myeka	Maala nimli	-
Tamil	Kanal myle (mirage peacock)	Kanragu kozhi	-
Malayalam	-	Chatta kozhi	-
Urdu/Punjab	Tuqdar Gurayin	-	-
Bengali	-	-	Dahar
Terai	-	-	Ablak(male) Bor(Female)
Nowgong, Assam	-	-	Olu moira (peacock of the ulu grass
Cacher	-	-	Dao tiriling

On the breeding of the Ashy crowned finch-lark (*Eremopterix grisea*) by Gaei Mundkur, Dept. of Biosciences, Saurashtra University, Rajkot 360 005: The ashy crowned finch-lark is said to breed more or less throughout the year, the principal months being February to September in the Peninsula. (Ali and Ripley, 1987, Handbook 5). The bird has been found to nest in mid-June in the neighbourhood of Baroda and in October, December, March and April around Bombay (Monga, JBNHS 80:575-612). Here in Rajkot, one nest was found on September 29, 1984 with two eggs, but it was found destroyed the next day.

On November 3, 1984 at 1040 h. a second nest was found with one egg. The nest being typical of the Alaudidae, a saucer like depression in the ground, under a rock facing the north-west. It was lined with grass, three small twigs of *Indigofera cardifolia*, string, cotton thread, polythene strands, a bit of cloth and a small piece of cardboard (the manmade components were 39.7 percent by weight). The nest was

rinned with a parapet of pebbles as described by Ali and Ripley (1983, Handbook 5). Two days later, a second egg was seen, the incubating. During the course of incubation both parents were seen incubating the eggs. On November 15, 1120 h. the eggs were examined and noted to be light buffy white, irregularly but evenly spotted with brown. They were measured, the mean size calculated to be 19.2 x 13.5 mm. One egg had two small holes (about 1 mm in diameter) at the broadest portion. The next day at 1320 h. one chick had hatched and was dry, the second had broken its shell in the form of a ring to wards the broad end, and was using its head to lever the shell off. After a few minutes of having removed it, the chick started climbing out of the larger half. The first hatchling was soot coloured with dull cream coloured downy feathers sparsely distributed on the head, wings, back and abdomen.

Both parents were seen to feed the chicks till the 23rd morning of November. In the afternoon, the nest was empty and a stray dog was sniffing around the area. Both the parents were seen coming to the nest with food but they did not find the chicks, the dog must have been the culprit.

Ali and Ripley (1983) state that the incubation period has not been determined. From the clutch observed, the incubation period was calculated to be 13-14 days.

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#### Correspondence

High flying birds by Peter Jackson, 1171 Bougy-Villars, Switzerland: You may remember that I wrote a few years back about highflying birds, particularly swans seen at around 27,000 feet off the coast of Scotland. Reading Arun Kumar Banerjee's article about vultures in which he quotes Guy Mountfort on vultures at 15,000 feet, reminded me that at the International Ornithological Congress in 1982, the avian record holder was named as Ruppell's griffon vulture at 11,000 metres (36,000 feet)! There was also mention of bar-headed geese overflying Annapurna at 9,000 meters (29,500 feet).

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Winter Migration of cranes to Gangnagar district (North-Rajasthan) by Dr. K.B.S. Dhillon: Common crane and probably demoiselle crane migrate to this district every year for the winter. Local people call both the species Koonj and hardly any body differentiates between the two species. Last



winter common cranes were seen in this district in two different localities on different dates. These were seen on the embankment of Ghaggar diversion channel on the South of Hanumangarh town on 2nd November 1983. Again a huge flock of the common cranes, about 150 birds were seen settled on an island formed in the waterlogged area on the road between Baropal and Pilibangan, in the afternoon of 26th January 1984. Damoiseille crane could not be sighted so far in this district.

On the morning of 31st August, 1984 at 7.15 am., nine cranes were seen flying low, in characteristic V formation; from across Pakistan international border, into this district. Their direction was from North West to South east. The characteristic grey colour and the straight position of necks and legs had confirmed that these were either of the two species. The birds were flying silently and flew right across the Ganganagar town. The date for the onward migration of the crane for wintering in this area is noteworthy and the flock was probably one of the early arrivals into the area. The birds were sighted from the campus of local S.G.M. Khalsa College, which is located on the north side of the town. Ganganagar town is located 20 km from Pakistan border.

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# ORIENTAL BIRD CLUB

The Oriental Bird Club, launched at the beginning of 1985, will appeal to both amateurs and professionals with an interest in Oriental birds. The Club intends to embrace the entire Oriental region, from the Indian subcontinent east to China and south to Indonesia. Much of the area is poorly known and many species are threatened, primarily from loss of habitat.

The aims of the Club are:

1. to encourage an interest in Oriental birds and their conservation.
2. to act as a forum for birdwatchers interested in Oriental birds who wish to correspond or meet to share experiences and findings.
3. to publish annually two bulletins and a journal, the Forktail. The bulletin will keep members informed of current developments in Oriental ornithology, and the journal will publish original papers on all aspects of Oriental birds.
4. to establish an up-to-date information exchange on the region, its birds and birdwatching localities, and to promote useful work for members visiting the Orient.
5. to work with other Oriental ornithological societies.

A network of overseas correspondents, all experts in their fields, has been set up to advise the Club, and many individuals and organisations throughout the world have pledged their support. The first bulletin will be published in spring 1985 and will include news and information, reports of recent expeditions and trips, current conservation issues, book reviews and an article on a good ornithological area.

Membership costs £6 a year for Ordinary Members but the club is appealing for 50 Founder Members, each paying a minimum of £20, to sponsor the Club in its first year. Further details and membership application forms are available from the Membership Secretary, Oriental Bird Club, c/o The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire, SG19 2DL, U.K.

A bank account is being opened in India in the new future and subscriptions can then be paid in rupees. Residents in the Orient who are members at ornithological organisations there are eligible for a reduced rate at £5 per annum.

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